

You Can Upgrade Shoreland Rules

The COLA Call

by Ed Mutsch

The previous two columns have discussed the presently ongoing effort to develop a set of updated shoreland rules for the state of Minnesota. This undertaking, mandated by the state legislature and led by the DNR, was initiated in January of this year and is projected to conclude in mid-2009. All Hubbard County residents concerned about the protection of our precious northern Minnesota water resources should avail themselves of the opportunities to help determine the final product of this updating process. The first such opportunity, which expired on May 20, 2008, came in the form of a call by DNR Commissioner Mark Holsten for public comments on possible amendments to the existing 1989 Minnesota shoreland rules. A series of twelve open houses being held throughout the state during the month of June offers a second avenue for citizen input; these meetings are providing information on the rule revision process and the potential areas that may be included, as well as on how to get involved. Nine of these open houses have been held; the remaining three are scheduled to be held from 6:30 – 9:30 P.M. at Hibbing Community College (June 23), Bemidji High School (June 24), and the International Falls Holiday Inn (June 25).

The shoreland update process is projected to proceed in three phases, i.e., Issue Identification (Jan.-July 2008), Policy & Option Recommendations (Aug.2008-Feb.2009), and Preliminary Rule Revisions (Mar-June 2008) with much of the work load to be shouldered by five committees, i.e., a Statewide External Advisory committee (SEA), a Local Government Unit Advisory committee (LGU) and three Geographically Focused Advisory (GFA) committees.

The SEA and LGU committees have been constituted. The former consists of 34 individuals representing a broad range of stakeholder interests including representatives of government, resort, forest, agriculture, and conservation groups. The LGU committee numbers 21 planners and zoning administrators from counties, cities and townships across the state. The names and affiliations of the individuals on these two committees can be found on the Minnesota DNR website.

The three GFA committees, South, Central and North, will be involved in Phases 2 and 3 of the shoreland rules update process and have yet to be impaneled. Each GFA will consist of up to 25 members representing a balanced representation from local government, lake associations, citizens-at-large, and other interest groups, and will focus on specific issues and recommendations most relevant to its geographic area, e.g., agricultural standards in the southern part of the state; urban shorelands and open space in central Minnesota; and density issues, resorts, and forestry standards in the north. Committee membership will require at least 5 meetings between August 2008 and December 2008. Member responsibilities will entail developing policy recommendations for the DNR to consider when preparing draft rule revisions. Any Minnesota citizen can apply for membership on one of these committees; Hubbard County citizens would presumably be most interested in the north GFA committee. Self-nomination forms are available on the DNR website at www.dnr.state.mn.us. However, the remaining time to apply is short. Application forms must be received NO LATER THAN JULY 1, 2008.

There are thus many channels through which Hubbard County citizens can input their suggestions for strengthening the protection of the Hubbard County water resources so important to our quality of life. One can attend a Shoreland Open House, communicate with members of the SEA, LGU, and/or GFA committees, and even apply for a position on one of the three GFA committees.

Minnesota shoreland rules were last revised in 1989, nearly 20 years ago. Given the tremendous institutional inertia that needs to be overcome before such a process can be triggered, it is unlikely that another opportunity will present itself anytime soon. Hubbard County citizens are urged to make the most of this one.

Much more information on this issue can be found on the Minnesota DNR website. As the website leaves much to be desired in terms of user friendliness, anyone frustrated with attempts to extract what they seek from the site should not hesitate to contact the writer.

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